

Grade Descriptions for Cambridge International A Level Global Perspectives & Research 9239

What are grade descriptions?

Grade descriptions describe the level of performance typically demonstrated by candidates achieving the different grades awarded for a qualification. For Cambridge International A Levels, they describe performance at three levels – grades ‘E’, ‘C’ and ‘A’.

Grade descriptions sit alongside other key documents that illustrate examination standards, including:

- the syllabus, which presents what students should be taught over a course of study and explains how this is assessed
- the specimen assessment materials, which exemplify the structure of the assessment and the kinds of tasks that candidates complete
- grade thresholds, which show the total mark required to achieve a grade.

Grade descriptions are produced with a wide range of audiences in mind. For teachers, they support lesson planning and curriculum development, while students may gain useful insights into what is required to achieve a high grade and what candidate performance at lower grades typically looks like. For university admissions staff and employers, and those less familiar with Cambridge, they paint a picture of typical performance at different grades.

Cambridge publishes grade descriptions for a qualification once examinations have taken place for the first time, and we review them when a qualification is substantially revised. They are developed by highly experienced examiners who understand performance standards in the subject area and have studied samples of candidate work.

How do I use this resource?

Grade descriptions are presented as a grid, with content areas at the start of each row and the different grades at the top of each column.

The content areas group together various aspects of the syllabus – they reflect topics, assessment objectives, key concepts, syllabus aims and components. The way they are organised is specific to each subject.

For each content area, there is a descriptor for each grade. Reading across the row from left to right, the descriptors represent increasing levels of performance with each grade descriptor building on, and including, the last.

Each column represents overall performance at a particular grade. Reading down the column from top to bottom, the descriptors capture the range of knowledge, understanding and skills that a candidate comfortably achieving the grade is likely to demonstrate.

Where content areas for the first and second halves of the A Level are distinct, they are also assessed at different standards. Performance for content areas assessed at AS Level is therefore described separately in this document.

Cambridge produces grade descriptions to support teaching and learning and the interpretation of candidate scores and grades. We do not use them to set grade thresholds. As such, they cannot be used to challenge the grade awarded to any individual candidate.

Grade descriptions

Area of knowledge, understanding and skills	Typical performance at grade E	Typical performance at grade C	Typical performance at grade A
Devise research question	Following on from preliminary research, students devise a research question that lends itself to in-depth research.	Students devise a research question that sets up a debate between contrasting perspectives. The question devised enables the student to find a range of relevant evidence to support contrasting perspectives.	Following on from preliminary research, students devise a specific research question that sets up a debate between contrasting perspectives. The question devised enables the student to find a wide range of relevant and credible evidence to support contrasting perspectives. The question can be analysed with reference to a range of themes and contexts.
Research log	Students keep a record of most of the research undertaken.	Students keep a record of all of the research undertaken and include some detailed notes about research findings. They use the research log to plan some of the next steps in the research process.	Students keep a record of all of the research undertaken and include consistent and detailed notes about research findings. They use the research log to plan consistently throughout the research process and to reflect on research decisions, evaluating their effectiveness.
Methods and methodology	Students identify a research method.	Students identify and use a research method(s) and begin to consider some strengths or limitations of the chosen method(s).	Students outline and justify their chosen methodology, demonstrating understanding of why particular methods have been chosen. They evaluate thoughtfully their methodology, acknowledging strengths as well as identifying areas for improvement.

Area of knowledge, understanding and skills	Typical performance at grade E	Typical performance at grade C	Typical performance at grade A
Analyse arguments and perspectives	Students identify arguments and evidence from source material that is relevant to the issue being debated.	Through analysis, students identify some key elements of relevant source material which they then use to support arguments and perspectives.	Through consistent analysis, students identify the key elements of relevant source material which they then use to support and challenge arguments and perspectives. They demonstrate sound understanding of relevant concepts and complex ideas.
Critical evaluation	Students apply evaluation criteria to their source material, identifying both strengths and weaknesses of arguments and evidence. Typically, they focus on aspects of provenance for critical evaluation. The critical evaluation is descriptive.	Students apply a range of evaluation criteria to their source material, identifying relevant strengths and weaknesses of arguments and evidence. Some of the critical evaluation is developed building on specific and relevant exemplification.	Students apply a wide range of evaluation criteria to their source material, identifying pertinent strengths and weaknesses of arguments and evidence. Critical evaluation is sharply focused on the issue under debate and applied in an insightful way that enables conclusions to be made.
Research	Students identify a range of research material that has relevance to the chosen topic area. They select research material that is descriptive and often lacking a strong line of argument.	Students select a range of research material that relates to the chosen topic area. In the second phase, they identify a specific focus for their research and select credible material most of which has well-evidenced arguments and perspectives emanating from a wide range of sources.	Students take a dynamic approach to research, beginning with a broad selection of topic-based source material that is highly relevant and credible. In the second phase, they identify a specific focus for their research and select academic material that is conceptual and has well-evidenced arguments and perspectives emanating from a wide range of sources.
Synthesis	Students show awareness of the links between research materials.	Students synthesise elements of arguments and evidence emanating from credible source materials together to construct coherent perspectives.	Students synthesise elements of arguments and evidence emanating from highly credible source materials together to construct coherent perspectives.

Area of knowledge, understanding and skills	Typical performance at grade E	Typical performance at grade C	Typical performance at grade A
	Typically, they juxtapose research materials together implicitly showing the relationships between them.	Some links between elements are explicit, whereas other links are implied. Synthesis is used to corroborate evidence and arguments, leading to some supported judgements.	Consistent synthesis of concepts, arguments and evidence is used to corroborate and challenge perspectives with critical insight, leading to well-supported judgements.
Making judgements	Students begin to make judgements that are supported by some of the evidence presented.	Students make supported judgements based on some comparison of perspectives. They are beginning to make judgements that are informed by evaluation of the evidence and arguments presented.	Students make well-supported judgements based on critical comparison of perspectives. Judgements are reasoned and informed by insightful evaluation of evidence, arguments and perspectives.
Communication	Students communicate ideas in spoken and written form with clarity in places. They structure their research report with some appropriate headings. They structure individual arguments coherently. They cite and reference research materials and begin to use subject-specific terminology.	Students communicate ideas in spoken and written form with clarity. They structure their research report with appropriate headings and organise ideas effectively. Arguments are coherently structured and some discourse markers are used to transition between different lines of argument. They cite and reference research materials consistently and use subject-specific terminology.	Students communicate ideas in spoken and written form with clarity, maintaining a sharp focus on the issue being debated. They structure their report effectively using headings that are logical, enabling the organisation of ideas to support the perspectives being presented. Arguments are coherently and logically structured with sustained use of discourse markers to transition between different lines of argument. They cite and reference research materials fully and consistently using an appropriate system and use subject-specific terminology consistently, making it accessible to the reader.

Area of knowledge, understanding and skills	Typical performance at grade E	Typical performance at grade C	Typical performance at grade A
Reflection	<p>Students begin to reflect upon the strengths and/or limitations of the report's conclusions. They begin to reflect upon their learning journey and how their personal viewpoint has changed or been consolidated.</p>	<p>Students reflect on the report's conclusions and make thoughtful comments about their strengths and limitations.</p> <p>They reflect upon why their personal viewpoint has changed or been consolidated with some reference to the alternative perspectives encountered.</p>	<p>Students reflect fully on the knowledge they have gained and evaluate the scope of the research, making insightful comments about the strengths and weaknesses of the research undertaken.</p> <p>They reflect thoughtfully upon why their personal viewpoint has changed or been consolidated with clear reference to the alternative perspectives encountered.</p> <p>They begin to reflect on how the interplay between themes and perspectives shaped the report.</p>
Additional content area assessed at AS Level standard			
Collaboration	<p><i>Students come together as a group to identify an area of study. They describe how they have collaborated with others.</i></p>	<p><i>Students work together to determine a local issue with global significance that forms the basis of a group project. They reflect upon the effectiveness of collaboration and show insight into the dynamics of the group.</i></p>	<p><i>Students work effectively as a group to determine a local issue with global significance that forms the basis of a group project. They reflect upon the effectiveness of collaboration and show critical insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the group and their role within it.</i></p>

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